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TIME

ARMED FORCES

Antisubmarine Boss

After 35 years' service ashore and afloat and 6,000 flying hours as a naval aviator, Rear Admiral John Smith Thach, 52, last week drew a unique assignment: goblin hunting. In Navy parlance, goblins are unidentified submarines. By Navy observation, goblins currently spotted on an average of once a week off the Atlantic coast are nosy members of a Russian submarine fleet that numbers almost 500 boats, and is already ten times the size of Germany's wolf pack at the outbreak of World War II. Very soon, new Soviet boats will have missile capacity; Central Intelligence Agency Chief Allen Dulles estimates that ten missile-carrying subs could destroy 1,600 sq. mi. of the U.S. seaboard's industrial complex unless anti-submarine defenses stop them. Admiral Thach's job: to renovate an antisub screen, that has become rusty with inadequate equipment, antiquated tactics and too much Navy attention to supercarriers.*

Lean, hard-eyed "Jimmy" Thach has a Navy reputation as a brilliantly effective man with new ideas. He earned it as World War II skipper of carrier-based Fighting Squadron Three when he used an unorthodox two-plane gunnery maneuver of his own devising (the Thach Weave), which brought down 19 of 16 attacking Japanese "Betty" bombers above the Coral Sea. Similarly, Thach's new job calls for new tactics. He assumes command of an experimental unit called Task Force Alpha, which includes the carrier *Valley Forge*, eight destroyers, two hunter-killer submarines, planes, helicopters and ships. His job is to weld them into a unit, put each element to new jobs in an effort to find goblins further away and faster.

Most of all, Thach and his men, with

* The U.S. offensive submarine program is making gains. Last week *Skate*, U.S. general attack submarine, crossed the Atlantic east to west under water in 7 days 13 hr., 45 min. off the old England-to-U.S. record of 10 days by *Nautilus*, became the first boat to make an Atlantic underwater round trip.

John Thach was dubbed "Little Jimmy" at Annapolis when he followed brother James (Jimmy) Thach Jr., now a vice-admiral, as "Little Jimmy" eventually became

their sonar underwater-detection gear, must learn to distinguish between lurking submarines and other mysterious sounds of the undersea. Says Thach: "You've got all sorts of noises down there in that jungle. They are decoys protecting the enemy. Fish talk to one another and smack their lips. Porpoises whistle and amorous whales sound like a fleet moving at full steam. Shrimps chew on things and make an ungodly racket. But those whales! They even foul up our magnetic detectors. They nibble at old wrecks and get nuts and bolts in their bellies. Reading the sound and the clues in that jungle is an art."

Airman Thach confidently expects to learn the art—and soon. Says he: "This is like a chess game; each piece has a dif-



U.S. Navy

ADMIRAL THACH

The shrimps chew on things.

ferent value. By playing them together, by using the submarine—which has the biggest ears—and the aircraft—which has the longest pinch—and the airship—which has the quietest touch—you win your game."